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AUTHOR Babcock, Suzan P.
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence of Chinese (and specifically Taiwanese) culture on the conduct of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Taiwan. Rapid economic development since the Second World War has led to a conflict of cultures, between traditional Chinese values and norms and Western values and norms. This conflict is especially felt in the ESL/EFL classroom, where instructional methods and the target language culture often conflict with standard Taiwanese instructional practices and the indigenous culture. Specific examples of these cultural and instructional clashes are presented and discussed, focusing on verbal and nonverbal cues in ESL/EFL classrooms. (Contains 51 references.) (MDM)

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The Significance of Cultural Influences Within the ESL/EFL Classroom; A Taiwan Experience

by

Suzan P. Babcock

This paper is being submitted for presentation for the Second International Conference on Teacher Education in Second Language Teaching at City Polytechnic of Hong Kong

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Second International Conference

on

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in

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Hong Kong

March 24 – 26, 1993

The Significance of Cultural Influences Within the ESL/EFL Classroom; A Taiwan Experience

by

Suzan P. Babcock
Department of English
National Taiwan Normal University
162 Hoping East Road, Section 1
Taipei, Taiwan

1. Taiwan – An Economic Miracle Tied to Tradition

Social-Oriented Character →	Direction of Change	→ Individual-Oriented Character
1. Collectivistic orientation		Individualistic orientation
2. Other-orientation		Self-orientation
3. Relationship orientation		Competitive orientation
4. Authoritarian orientation		Equalitarian orientation
5. Submissive disposition		Enjoyment orientation
6. Inhibited disposition		Autonomous disposition
7. Effeminate disposition		Expressive disposition

**Developed by K.S. Yang*

2. A Clashing of Diverse Cultures
   - A. Missed Classroom Cues
   - B. Problems Presenting Culturally Based ESL/EFL Materials
     1. Some Background Information
   - C. Cultural Assumptions
     1. Native Speaking Teacher Assumptions
     2. Non-native Speaking Teacher
     3. Non-native Speaking Students
3. Concluding Remarks
   - A. Non-native speaking students and teachers of ESL/EFL are experiencing culturally based difficulties in the classroom.
   - B. These problems are not always apparent.
   - C. These problems are linked to the students' socio-cultural background and that of the target language.
   - D. The students' responses may take on certain general characteristics, not unlike those of the "culture shock" syndrome.
   - E. Teachers and students need to be aware of this phenomenon and become sensitized to it.
   - F. Culturally based materials need to include a broader spectrum in order to help avoid the "cultural imperialism" stumbling block, and to take a more global approach.

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The tiny tobacco leaf shaped island of Taiwan lies about 120 miles off the coast of mainland China's Fukien Province. It runs some 250 miles in length and is 80 miles at its widest point. Politically, it is considered the smallest of all the provinces of China and is currently suffering from the effects of its own and China's impasse regarding who is the rightful heir.

Taiwan has had a lengthy history of voluntary and involuntary interactions with people who were not indigenous to her shores. Her fertile plains and valleys, densely lined forests of rattan, oak, fir, pine and camphor; untouched mineral resources, sulfur, coal and iron, and precious gemstones – opals, jadeite and coral, unwittingly provided commercial enticement to those from foreign and nearby lands.

Early mainland settlers from the Kwangtung and Fukien coasts were the first supposed Chinese, followed by the Japanese, Dutch, Spanish, British and American adventurers, traders and capitalists. As to be expected, each foreign encounter left its mark of "change" upon this island and her people.

Strongly interwoven throughout this island's historical and political fabric is the distinct design of Chinese culture. An important part of this culture is its past and continued adherence to the tenants and teachings of Confucius. These principles have been integrated into all areas of Chinese life; political, business, social and academic. Bond and Hwang (1986) summarize the following core elements of Confucianism as support for a construct regarding Chinese social psychology:

1. Man exists through, and is defined by his relationships to others.
2. These relationships are constructed hierarchically.
3. Social order is ensured through each party's honor ing the requirements in the role relationship.

These aspects are important ingredients which directly fit into the cultural mosaic that enters with the Chinese student, into the classroom, as he begins his journey in studying English as a Second or Foreign Language.

Many years ago, farsighted leaders and educators in Taiwan foresaw the need to educate as many of its citizens as possible in the international language of the future – English. Numerous programs were designed and launched. As a result, the study of English as a Second or Foreign Language found its way into the mainstream of Taiwan society.

The classroom experience in Taiwan, with regards to English instruction has met varying degrees of success. It has also encountered unforeseen obstacles. Careful examination of some of the problems that non-native speakers are encountering, has led to some interesting research. One proposed thought is that proficiency in a language does not mean knowing only its vocabulary, semantics, syntax and phonology. It also means being able to successfully integrate this knowledge into appropriate forms of communication (Canale 1983; Canale & Swain 1980; Hymes, 1972), while having the ability to assess and choose other forms of relative information or knowledge to fit the situation. The ability to select correct situational information and the ability to control the type of sentence response (Bailystock & Sharwood Smith, 1985), is necessary for communicative competence.

Taiwan's educators, in addressing this need for cultural awareness and its inclusiveness into local English language programs are finding that such efforts are being met with limited success. One main reason is that the educational framework in Taiwan, from which this material can be introduced, limits such presentation.

Taiwan students are still bound to the time-honored tradition of the competitive qualifying examination system. They are engulfed by internal and external pressures in their academic work.

Their teachers also face similar challenges. Large class enrollments, the need for access and the ability to use relevant and up-to-date teaching materials, in addition to time constraints, are looming issues.

A second reason why Taiwan students' study of ESL/EFL from a cultural perspective is meeting with unexpected stumbling blocks is due to the overwhelming diversity which exists within the targeted culture's components.

This, coupled with the unfortunate assumption that all native speakers have perfect knowledge and absolute control of their own language often leads to confusion on the part of non-native speakers and non-native speaking teachers; especially when encountering native speakers in a variety of contact.

Third, The appearance on Taiwan of English as the international language, is having a "bitter-sweet" effect. On one hand, it is recognized that English is needed for the promotion of the island's technological development, but on the other, there is a strong undercurrent of resistance and feeling towards the West and its spread of "cultural imperialism". This can lead into a classic "love-hate" relationship with the learning and teaching process of ESL/EFL. A further complication, is the ironic situation that "cultural imperialism" is often inflicted upon the non-native speaker by members of his own culture. (Abbot, 1992).

The Changing Rules...Taiwan Style

Directly related to a Chinese child's education is the culture's rules for socialization. Traditionally, these have included: dependency training, conformity training, modesty training, self-suppression training, self-contentment training, punishment preference, shaming strategies, parent-centeredness, and multiple parenting. (Yang, 1986)

Since the ending of World War II, when Taiwan entered the age of modernism, her rags-to-riches success story has amazed the international community. She has achieved the impossible by carefully applied logic, well-planned strategies and hard work. She has created an "economic miracle".

Yang (1986) again points to a shift in the traditional socialization process under the influences of modernization.

	Social-Oriented Character → Direction of Change →	Individual-Oriented Character
1.	Collectivistic orientation	Individualistic orientation
2.	Other-orientation	Self-orientation
3.	Relationship orientation	Competitive orientation
4.	Authoritarian orientation	Equalitarian orientation
5.	Submissive disposition	Enjoyment orientation
6.	Inhibited disposition	Autonomous disposition
7.	Effeminate disposition	Expressive disposition

This transition process is not without difficulties. Taiwan's people are scrambling to hang onto or discard old cultural beliefs, systems and power. No area of the society has escaped from the transition effects of regular contact with Western developed nations. These transition effects have trickled down to the ESL/EFL classroom.

Now, with this backdrop for our stage as educators, How do we begin to address the challenge of the clashing of diverse cultures within our classrooms? This is an important area which is worthy of continued research and study. Due to the nature and guidelines of this conference, I will raise and address certain issues and problems that non-native speakers and teachers of English as a Second or Foreign Language seem to encounter in the non-native speaking classroom, with the hope that such a discussion will prove to be of assistance to those working with non-native speakers.

First the problems to be addressed are those of missed classroom language cues, confusion and consequences of misunderstood non-verbal cultural clues; and their relationship to the successful working of communicative patterns of the targeted language. Second, problems are encountered when presenting culturally based material. Third, the issue of cultural assumptions on the part of native English teachers, non-native English teachers, and non-native speakers, may hinder the necessary connection needed for mutual understanding and successful completion of teacher-directed tasks.

The observations and assessments depicted in this paper have been in the context of my direct involvement with teaching of English as a Foreign Language, the teaching of a course entitled "Language & Culture", at the National Taiwan Normal University; and communications shared with other teachers of EFL or ESL.

Confusion Within the Classroom Setting

Missed Verbal and Nonverbal Cues

Non-native speaking students are lacking in specific classroom language cues which encourage conversational participation. Classroom language cues are specifically worded phrases, statements or questions which help the speaker and listener to clarify their conversational intentions. Missed language cues often lead to confusion on both sides; especially if the classes are being conducted in the targeted language for the benefit of promoting student competencies. Non-native speaking students are often shocked when called upon by their native speaking teachers to give their opinion on a particular subject. An awkward class silence most often ensues. The teacher waits patiently for the question to be answered, while the students sit with downcast eyes. Many times the students are feeling shy, nervous, high levels of stress, acute embarrassment and "loss of face" along with a sense of impending failure. What has indeed happened is called a pragmatic failure. The non-native speakers' shocked and confused reactions to such a classroom approach which was not within their realm of experience and expectations, resulted in a shut-down of communications between them and their teacher.

> *The transfer of the norms of one community to another community may well lead to 'pragmatic failure', and to the judgement that the speaker is in some way being impolite, uncooperative, etc.*(Leech, 1989)

> *The concepts regarding "face" for a Chinese, are not unlike those found in other cultures. Traditionally, for the Chinese, it has meant self-respect for one's personal dignity, feelings and how they viewed themselves socially in front of others.*

> *To augment this view, to include other cultures, we need to add the following socialization items as well. These items include: acceptance, status, a feeling of equality, sincerity, care, approval, praise, intimacy, choice, being appreciated, generosity, respect for privacy, formality, modesty and deference.*(Lii-Shih, 1990).

Miscommunication occurs when one culture has placed a stronger or weaker emphasis on any of these universal needs, which results in a differing of cultural views from the other culture.

> *For example, intimacy is in conflict with formality and modesty might be in conflict with an appreciation or agreement. Choice among them is determined by the situation, the type of speech act, the degree of intimacy, and most important of all, cultural values. ...in one culture, deference may be valued more highly than intimacy, while in another culture, it may be the opposite.*
> (Lii-Shih, 1990).

Cultural values such as relationships and a strong concern for the pecking order or hierarchical structure of its society, continues to play a major role in Taiwan. Children learn to recognize their role in different social situations and the roles of the people around them at an early age.

This fixed modeling process is quite different from the way children in North America, for example, are taught. Their social orientation focuses upon the formulation of thought into personal viewpoints and to become self-sufficient within their group settings.

A careful explanation or presentation of culturally oriented material about Western classrooms may aid non-native speaking students in their understanding of their native teacher's approach to classroom teaching, and thus assist their teacher in bringing about a successful completion of desired tasks. Ideally, the presentation of such material should occur at the initial meeting between the native teacher and the non-native speaking students.

After recognizing that a mixing-up of cultural signals was happening in my classroom, it became apparent that I would have to learn as much as I could about my students' cultural values, their perceptions and expectations of me, the "foreign" teacher. They in turn, would have to become aware of my expectations of them within our classroom setting. We began with the use of specific language cues and phrases.

The following teacher-student interactions demonstrate some of the sought-after student responses, which are necessary for successful language interaction.

Example One:

Teacher: *(noticing a student's discomfort) Would you like me to reword what I just asked you?*

Student: *Yes, I don't understand.*

Teacher: *Yes, I would like to know...*

Example Two:

Student: *Would you please speak more slowly?*

Teacher: *I said...*

Example Three:

Student: *Do you mean...?*

Teacher: *Yes, that is what I meant.*

Example Four:

Student: *How can I improve... (my English)?*

Teacher: *Do you mean pronunciation?*

Student: *Yes.*

Teacher: *You could...(meet with me for some extra help or go to the language lab for some additional practice.)*

Student: *Do you think...(it will help me to speak more fluently)?*

Teacher: *It will help you...(with your pronunciation and practice will help you to speak more fluently.*

Student: *Oh, thank you.*

Often the native teacher encounters his students repeatedly expressing themselves inappropriately with their understood sets of language cues. These expressions are generally the result of a direct translation from the student's native language into English. Although understandable, it should be pointed out that one of the goals for the non-native speaker is to learn to communicate effectively in a manner that is easily recognized and accepted by a native speaker. This will help to reduce the possibility of miscommunication and boost the student's motivation to continue with his study and use of English.

The following is a list of some of the expressions that my students have been known to misuse in the classroom.

	Inappropriate Expression	Suggested Replacement Expression
1.	How to say in English?	How would you say this word in English?
2.	I don't understand/know your meaning.	I don't understand what you have said.
3.	How to improve my English?	How can I improve my English?
4.	I am so poor.	My ability is not very good.
5.	I think I can't do all of this work myself.	I don't think that I can do all of this work by myself.
6.	I have to go home and read books.	I have to go and study.
7.	Please talk louder, I can't listen to you.	Please speak a little louder, I can't hear you.
8.	I don't talk English well be cause I don't know enough vocabularies.	I can't speak English well because I don't know enough vocabulary.

9.	My name is called Jane.	My name is Jane.
10.	Thank you for your help ings. Oh, never mind.	Thank you for your help.
11.	I want a paper please.	May I please have a piece of paper?
12.	I cannot sure.	I am not sure.
13.	This problem is very trouble.	This problem is causing me a lot of trouble.
14.	He learned English not very well.	He hasn't learned enough English yet.
15.	I forgot one vocabulary.	I forgot what this word means.

Just as verbal clues are important, so are non-verbal clues. We send and receive non-verbal clues each moment that we are awake.

Our facial expressions, gestures, posture, body movements and manner of dress often tell more accurate tales than do our words. The way we speak, our tone, volume and speed all convey additional meaning. These clues are also indicators as to what form our pattern of communication should take. The fact that non-verbal forms of expression may have different or more than one meaning can further confuse cross-cultural learners.

> *In face-to-face interactions, studies have found, only 7 percent of emotional meaning is actually expressed with words; 55 percent is sent through facial expressions, posture and gestures, and 38 percent is transmitted through the tone of voice. And when verbal and non-verbal messages do not mesh, the non-verbal message is nearly always believed...*

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> *So, children who cannot express themselves accurately with their body, facial language and voice quality, or who cannot 'read' such expressions from others, are likely to get things all wrong. Unless someone recognizes their problem and helps them overcome it, they will continue to make the same mistakes.* (Nowicki & Duke, 1992).

Among native speakers, the nodding of a head or a smile often indicates to the speaker agreement or understanding. A frown or lack of any facial expression tells the speaker that there is a disagreement, or what is being said is unclear. Acting upon these non-verbal cues, the speaker may then go into a lengthy explanation which provides additional information, in hopes of clarifying the point which was intended to be understood. If there is any lingering doubt in the speaker's mind that he/she has been misunderstood, a request for questions will be issued.

Non-native speaking students may react to this request for questions with silence. Their response could be culturally based, that is, they could be dutifully showing respect to their teacher. A corollary to this may be the implication that a "loss of face" might occur if the students admitted that they did not understand the teacher.

In order to facilitate smoother classroom communication, it is necessary for the non-native speaking student to understand the culturally patterned non-verbal forms of communication a native teacher may use. The following non-verbal cues are frequently found within a classroom setting and are used by native speakers.

	Non-verbal Cue	Meaning to Native Speaker
1.	a smile	greeting, giving encouragement, approval.
2.	a frown	disagreement, uncertainty, unhappiness
3.	raising of eyebrows	surprise, wonderment, disbelief.
4.	widening of eyes or rolling of eyes	surprise, uncertainty, disbelief
5.	no facial expression	serious concentration is being paid to what is being said, boredom, not wanting to convey any opinion

6.	tilting of one's head to right or left	expressing curiosity or interest
7.	looking directly at speaker	showing the speaker that he/she has the listener's attention
8.	shrugging of shoulders	uncertainty
9.	holding of the index finger in front of mouth	please be quiet
10.	making the sign of a "T" with the two index fingers	time to stop

Being familiar with the basic cues of the targeted language will greatly enhance the language attempts of the learner. Teachers need to be supportive when assisting students with their periods of cultural transition. Discussion of specific uses for non-verbal cues within the classroom setting, may also lead into role-playing situations pertaining to real life situations.

Teachers may wish to address the importance of matching correct "cultural rhythms" and "the use of time". For instance, non-native speaking students may be unaware of the cultural importance of having to wait in line for transportation, or some service related task. Specific-role playing situations for waiting in line at a bank, post office or for the movies may be useful. The use of "space" may be pointed out through demonstrations of how students would distance themselves when speaking to a teacher, policeman, another student or a stranger. Important non-verbal facial expressions can often send the listener misinformation. Failure to make direct eye contact, inappropriate laughter or smiles may lead to a breakdown in communication. Video taping role-playing situations may help students learn the proper non-verbal responses.

With the use of specific verbal and non-verbal classroom cues, non-native speaking students should be able to overcome their basic uncertainties as to what forms of classroom communication are expected of them by their native-speaking teachers. Confusion will be lessened and successful linking of communication and cultural patters will be re-enforced.

Some Background Information

By the time Taiwan students appear in university and college classrooms, they will have completed a rigorous educational ordeal. They will have successfully passed years of "qualifying" examinations. In helping them to prepare for these exams, their teachers structure their lesson plans "around the exam". Senior high school students and teachers do not have time for conversational exchanges in English. Why? Because the Joint College Entrance Examination does not test for the students' spoken abilities. As a result, students receive instruction only in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, writing and reading. If, by chance, oral communication skills are introduced, they are minimal at best, not to say, lacking culturally based materials.

For those students and teachers who do want to practice oral communication skills on their own, further disadvantages await them. The lack of a natural learning environment, and opportunities to mingle with native speakers and practice, make their attempts almost doomed to failure before they even begin.

It is therefore, not surprising to find that these non-native speakers have some hesitancy about expressing themselves in English, when given the opportunity to do so.

Their lack of training in the communicative process, their instruction in traditional teaching methods; rote grammar-translation, lack of opportunity to practice, a lack of understanding of the cultural implications of textbook materials, and the sociological circumstances under which English is presented as an international language, have created a massive challenge for those of us involved with teaching and learning of ESL/EFL in Taiwan.

Problems Encountered When Presenting Culturally Based Material

What is culture? Over the years, linguists, sociologists and cultural anthropologists have tried to provide us with accurate definitions of culture. Edward Sapir best sums it up with his statement, "All cultural behavior is patterned." (Sapir, 1949). Edward Hall compiled a useful system entitled the Hall Grid (Addendum A) in order to categorize the ten different kinds of human activity. It includes major areas of cross-cultural variation such as role, status, class, patterns of thinking, relationships of individuals and the functions of language, and non-verbal communication. It is into these patterns of human activity, we step when we enter a culture which is different from our own. With each new step of the journey, new cultural information is presented to us. How it is presented will determine our willingness to accept, filter or reject it.

As the process begins, the receiver of this new cultural information enters into what is commonly known as the "culture shock" syndrome. It affects the non-native speaking students who automatically begin to compare their culture with that of the targeted language's. The native teacher is also affected. To what degree depends upon a number of factors. The need for extreme sensitivity, patience, good will, flexibility and a sense of humor is in order, especially if the students and teacher are to be successful in establishing effective classroom cross-cultural communication.

> *The term "culture shock" was coined in 1958 by Oberg who suggested that it resulted from anxiety over losing familiar signs and symbols.* (Damen, 1987).

It is generally thought of as being one of the four stages leading towards acculturation. These stages involve coming from limited interactions with the foreign culture, to a level of curiosity and the willingness to obtain more information. This first phase is commonly called the euphoria phase. Everything about the new culture seems fresh and exciting.

The second phase or "culture shock" is one where the individual is wrestling with the feelings of resentment, uncertainty, confusion, anger and depression which have been brought about by new cultural information and awareness. Complaining about local ways and customs, seeking out other countrymen and isolation from the host culture are typical reactions.

The third phase is one of gradual recovery and a sense of being able to cope reasonably with the many stresses that might be encountered. A certain feeling of personal accomplishment sets in, which aids in fostering more empathic feelings with those from the other culture.

The fourth stage, many times, is in place before the individual is aware of it. Peter Adler points out that there is

> *...a set of situations or circumstances involving intercultural communication in which the individual, as a result of the experiences, becomes aware of his own growth, learning and change. As a result of the culture shock process, the individual has gained a new perspective on himself, and has come to understand his own identity in terms significant to himself. The cross-cultural learning experience, additionally, takes place when the individual encounters a different culture and as a result (a) examines the degree to which he is influenced by his own culture and (b) understands the culturally derived values, attitudes and outlooks of other people.* (Adler, 1972).

The careful introduction of culturally related materials into the classroom is recommended in order to help guide non-native speakers through their struggle with the culture shock process.

> *It is exceedingly important that teachers allow learners to proceed into and through that second stage, through the anomie, and not to force a quick bypass of the second stage. We should not expect learners to deny the anger, the frustration, the helplessness and homelessness they feel. Those are real feelings and they need to be openly expressed. To smother those feelings may delay and actually prevent eventual movement into the third stage. A teacher can enable learners to understand the source of their anger and frustration, emerge from those depths to a very powerful and personal form of learning.* (Brown, 1987).

Students from my Language & Culture class recently encountered a conflicting cultural learning situation. This experience unfortunately had to do with mis-information they had received while in high school about "American culture".

The purpose of the class lesson was to introduce the students to different types of regional foods found within the United States. The students divided themselves into pairs or small groups. Each group was given a different type of regional cookbook accompanied by a handout of related tasks to be completed within the group. Students were given a time limit, which was to be followed by a general group sharing of what information the groups had discovered.

Things were going along smoothly until one student spoke up. Her face was one of conflicting emotion. "Why don't Americans eat the insides of animals?" she asked me.

I paused, while my thoughts raced together. "Where was this question coming from? Did she understand the purpose of the lesson? Had I not been clear at the beginning of the class and with my instructions? Why was she waiting for this particular moment, when the class was almost over, to ask this question?" I felt frustrated.

Then I asked her why she was asking her question. She responded that one of her teachers in school had told her that "Americans don't do this".

There was dead silence in the classroom. All the students were looking at me and waiting for my answer.

To respond by telling her that her teacher's information was incorrect would have been insensitive on my part. I did not want to make her teacher or my student "lose face" due to cultural unawareness. Finally, I said, "Let's see if we can find any recipes for the insides of animals in these cookbooks. What possible headings do you think they would be listed under?" The tension disappeared and we were all unified in our search for the missing answer.

The problem of being culturally sensitive, especially when dealing with mis-information, needs to be addressed cautiously. As with the case of my young student, she obviously was struggling with a number of issues. It was important that her culture not be devalued, otherwise a strong and undesirable feeling might be fanned, resulting in the surfacing of "cultural imperialism" attitudes.

Perhaps, one way to avoid such situations in the future, would be a more multi-cultural approach regarding culturally based ESL/EFL materials.

> *There are other cultures, for which English as an international language and English teaching as a global profession are natural media. 'Broadening students' horizons' is a traditional objective of educational activity and the expression takes on a new and more urgent meaning in the time of global environmental disasters and the collapse of international barriers.* (Prodromou, 1992).

Cultural Assumptions

Cultural assumptions on the part of native English teachers and non-native speaking students hinder the necessary connection needed for mutual understanding and successful completion of teacher-directed tasks. A cultural assumption may be defined as a norm or way of doing something in one's own culture that is supposed to be understood by those individuals living in the said culture or from that said culture.

> *In the United States, students are expected to participate actively in their classes. They are expected to ask and answer questions. Students can also ask brief questions in class or see the teacher privately for extra help or lengthier explanations of class material.* (Genzel & Cummings, 1986).

It is from this cultural reference that native speaking teachers base their instructional method. For those of us trained and employed as teachers of ESL/EFL, this particular U.S. cultural item can be a tremendous stumbling block when working with students from other cultures whose educational models are not geared to supporting such interactions between teacher and student. Motivating students to recognize and actively integrate the assumed and stated teacher expectations of the targeted language, once again requires enormous amounts of patience, time, energy, flexibility and the ability to "blend" teaching methods and techniques.

Miscommunication happens when cultural assumptions are unwittingly employed. When this situation arises, the teacher and students feel a profound sense of frustration. Miscommunication can, however, provide numerous opportunities for cultural learning. The following example illustrates this point.

In one of my early experiences teaching in Taiwan, I entered the classroom and cheerfully greeted my students. Many students smiled and returned my greeting. Just as I was about to begin the class, two female students approached and asked to speak with me. Both girls were smiling. One of the girls began to speak. She said that she had just received word that her father had taken ill and could she please be excused from class in order to return home as soon as possible. After she had finished speaking, both girls burst out giggling. I was dumbstruck. I couldn't imagine what could be so funny about this poor girl's father's situation. The girls continued to giggle

until I had collected myself and gave the girl permission to leave the class. It wasn't until later, after I had given much serious consideration as to what had happened, that I realized the giggling and laughter on the part of the two girls, was a sign of nervousness. Had the girls responded with other native speakers, as they had with me, in a native-speaking environment, where smiling and laughter are displays of agreement and happiness, they might have encountered different reactions to their selected style of communicating personal misfortune.

I decided to take this opportunity to introduce my class to specific ways to communicate with native speakers in different social situations. I created a variety of role-playing situations and then assigned my students to work in pairs. As each pair would present their interpretations of their role-playing situation, I would take notes as to how I would instruct my students to improve upon their understanding of the social situation and their ways of communication. After each pair had concluded their activity, I would offer my comments to that pair. Many cultural issues came forth and were discussed. I noted these issues with the intention to incorporate them into future lesson plans for other classes.

The second part of my unit plan on "Effective Communication Within Different Cultural Settings" was to ask the class to "brainstorm" in groups and write up possible social situations a non-native speaker might encounter within Chinese society. I then asked my students to put their role-playing situations into a box. It was at this point that I told them that I would draw their suggestions from the box and role-play with different class members. I asked the class to take notes, so that they might give me "feedback" as to how I had handled my understanding of, and response to the role play.

This activity was a smashing success because it seemed to illustrate to the students that just as certain expectations are made of them to interact in target-language based situations, they also expected me to act within the context of expectations from their culture base with the target language.

Understanding the cultural patterns and group dynamics of a non-native student classroom is necessary if cultural miscommunication is to be kept at a minimum. Focused observation and the willingness to reach out across cultural borders are necessary. Mutually identified cultural assumptions will aid teachers and students in achieving success when interacting together in the cross-cultural classroom.

Concluding Remarks

Non-native speaking students, who are studying English as a Second or Foreign Language, are experiencing culturally based difficulties in the classroom. These problems do not always show themselves right away or in any one clearly defined manner. Non-native speaking students are many times caught off-guard when confronted with Western educational materials and methodologies. Often they do not know how to formulate acceptable responses within this classroom situation due to a conflict with their own cultural values and those of the target language. This causes a shut-down or misunderstanding about student-teacher expectations, thus cross-cultural communication does not take place. One way to minimize such occurrences, is to provide students with specific classroom and conversational cues before the class is well underway. Additional cultural material may be introduced to let students see a correlation between the method and the end result.

The individual's responses to another's culture can take on certain general characteristics. These characteristics have been studied and termed "culture shock" reactions.*(see Brown).* Non-native speaking students often experience one or more forms of culture shock when studying the targeted language and culturally related materials. Teachers and students need to become aware of the nature of this phenomenon; and native and non-native teachers may need to seek innovative and alternative ways to support students in their explorations and interest in English language learning. Culturally based materials need to include a broader spectrum in order to help avoid the "cultural imperialism" stumbling block and to take a more global approach to ESL/EFL language instruction. It is hoped that this paper suggests some of those ways.

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